

Funding schedules could delay Grand grade separations

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Daily News-Sun
November 8, 2007 - 11:25AM



Sun City HOA director and transportation chairman Gary Bourne talks with Fred Garcia of ADOT at a meeting Wednesday to discuss the widening of Grand Avenue through the Sun Cities and beyond. Mollie J. Hoppes/Daily News-Sun

Dirt will be turned on the widening of Grand Avenue in 2009, but Sun Citians will have to wait for the construction of possible underpasses and overpasses.

About 250 residents packed the Fairway Recreation Center auditorium Wednesday to voice their opinions on what the Arizona Department of Transportation should do with \$64 million in funding planned to help improve Grand Avenue several years after it is widened from four lanes to six.

From 2011 to 2015 funding is available for further improvements along Grand Avenue and Sun Citians know exactly what they want.

Ever since the idea of widening Grand Avenue was brought to the public years ago, Sun City residents have pleaded for grade separations under or over the increasingly busy road.

The problem that ADOT and residents involved face is that funding schedules set by the Maricopa Association of Governments do not allow grade separations to be built when the road is widened. There is a set amount of money available for the first phase, the widening and a separate amount for additional improvements down the road.

Many residents argued that money should be advanced or found elsewhere to meet the needs of the residents.

Shelli Dedmon wants just one of the grade separations included in the widening.

"If funding can't be found ADOT needs to look elsewhere," she said. "See if the railway (BNSF) would assist."

Dedmon wants either an under or overpass for safety concerns. She thinks it would allow senior traffic to avoid a busy Grand Avenue and railroad, while still being able to access Sun Health Boswell Hospital.

ADOT has brought forth four potential grade separations along Grand Avenue — one each at 103rd Avenue, Del Webb Boulevard, Bell Road and Meeker Boulevard. Also included in this study would be possible improvements to the intersections at Greenway Road, closing the canals along Grand and improving the frontage road at Thunderbird Road.

"You can't do all of this for \$64 million," said Timothy Tait, ADOT communication director. "You can't put a grade separation at every road."

Recently, Recreation Centers of Sun City board member Norm Dickson called on his residents to come speak out against the widening, saying that ADOT is just trying to move traffic around Sun City.

"They don't really care about us in the middle," he said.

Tait heard some of those comments Wednesday.

"We did not build Grand Avenue in the middle of Sun City," he said. "No one foresaw what a major commuter route it would become. Now 300,000 people live on the other side of Sun City."

When it comes down to it one overriding issue still prevails.

"Unfortunately the money has been allocated for widening now and for grade separations later," Tait said. "Grand Avenue will be a challenge today and it will be again tomorrow."